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SUBJECT: 2010 Presidential elections on the horizon

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: President Compaore has been in power since 1987. As a result of a change to the constitution in 2000, he is eligible to run for President one final time in 2010. The likely outcome of the elections is predictable: a clear Compaore victory in the first round. Because the numerous opposition parties do not have access to the same resources (financial, logistic) as the party in power the elections are naturally skewed in favor of the incumbent. In preparation for 2010, the electoral commission has published a tentative election-year calendar, starting with the revision of the registry in January 2010 and ending with voting in November 2010.  
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) President Compaore has been in power in Burkina Faso for more than twenty two years. In 2005, Compaore was reelected to a third term in office with 80 percent of the vote. Because of constitutional changes (Article 37 of the Constitution was amended in April 2000) this term is in fact considered his "first" under the new constitution (Note: Each new constitutional change affecting the Office of the President takes effect at the time of the National Assembly vote and is not retroactive. End Note.). The Burkinabe constitution currently allows for two five-year terms of office. Most political observers believe that Compaore will easily win the 2010 elections. While elections in Burkina Faso have been described as mostly free and somewhat fair, access by opposition parties to electoral resources are limited and do not create a level playing field.

¶3. (U) A new electoral law (Article 48 - Item 4 of May 7, 2009) now allows for non-resident Burkinabe nationals to participate in presidential elections and national referendums. However, due to the absence of requisite legal arrangements and the high cost of expatriate voting, the National Assembly adopted a new law (on January 25th, 2010) that postponed this voting right until the 2015 presidential elections. This law does not extend expatriate voting rights to legislative or municipal elections.

¶4. (U) The National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI), which is tasked with planning and running elections and referendums in Burkina Faso, has set the following election calendar.

- January 1-31, 2010:

Revision of the voter registry -- update and correct the existing registry and draft a final registry that will gain cross-party consensus. (Note: Revisions are running a month behind schedule but should not impact the election date.)

- March 1-31, 2010:

The Constitutional Court officially announces the date of the presidential election.

- September 26 or October 3, 2010:

The Constitutional Court publishes the final candidate list.

- October 17 or 24, 2010 (at midnight):

Electoral campaigning begins (first round of the presidential elections.)

- November 6 or 13, 2010 (at midnight):

Electoral campaigning ends.

- November 7 or 14, 2010:

Voting begins (from 6:00 AM to 6:30 PM).

¶5. (U) Electoral rules stipulate that if no single candidate wins the majority of the votes (51 percent) in the first round, then a second round will oppose the two candidates receiving the most votes in the first round. By regulation, the second round has to take place within 15 days of the official announcement, by the Constitutional Court, of the first round results.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: We expect voter participation to increase in the 2010 presidential elections as opposition parties work hard to garner votes, thereby increasing their credibility, and ensure a big turnout. In 2005, 57.5 percent of the 3.9 million registered voters participated in the elections. Compaore will most likely easily win the election in the first round. The more than 300 opposition parties are still not sufficiently organized, nor are they sufficiently financially endowed to really compete against Compaore. According to the revised Constitution, the 2010 elections should, in principle, be Compaore's last election. It is uncertain whether Compaore will adhere to the current constitution and step down in 2015 or whether he will attempt to revise Article 37 in order to run again. END COMMENT.

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